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Mother/daughter duo raises rare Belgium Blues
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By Ashley Trosper
June 18, 2008

Photo By State Journal/Hilly Schiffer

Diana Hogan rubs Itzy's ears on her Bluegrass Meadows farm. Itzy is one of 90 Belgium Blue cows, a breed extremely rare to Kentucky, on the 300-acre farm in Peaks Mill. Hogan helps her mother, Bettie Mefford, run the farm. Hogan said it is sometimes hard to see the cows leave the farm. "They can be like pets when you raise them from when they are calves," Hogan said.

They make an extraordinarily unique mother/daughter duo.

Diana Hogan and Bettie Mefford, 80, do more than share recipes, plant flowers and exchange secrets " they raise cattle.

And at Mefford Family Farms, it's not just any cattle. It's Belgium Blue, a breed rare to the Bluegrass state, according to Hogan, who said her older brother, Ivan, got them into the Belgium Blue market about 12 years ago.

"He saw them at a livestock show and thought they were different," Hogan said. "They have leaner meat than other cattle."

Hogan says her family has always had some cattle on their 300 acres and Belgium Blue breeding is something she and Mefford have taken on together.

"My brother is a family practice doctor in Texas," Hogan said. "My father passed away in February of 2000, so it's been Mom and me ever since."

Hogan retired from the Environmental Protection Agency after 28 years in 2002 and Mefford worked for the Farm Service Agency for 31 years.

Mefford says they make a tremendous team.

"She's the only daughter I have," Mefford said. "So we have always been close, but doing this does bring us even closer together."

And these women are not afraid of getting dirty. Mefford said it's not uncommon for them to hitch a trailer full of cattle to their truck and drive to the Houston livestock show in Texas.

"Diana has had her nose broken trying to get some calves in the trailer," Mefford said. "When we go on these trips, we have to stay over night, and Diana has to make sure the cows are fed every morning. She does everything."

Hogan and Mefford take care of close to 90 cattle. Hogan does everything from feeding and transporting to calving in the spring.

"I enjoy going with Diana to see about the calves," Mefford said. "The whole thing is interesting."

Hogan said they have three full-blooded Belgium Blue bulls used to breed with other Belgium Blues as well as other breeds.

"We breed the bulls with other types and sell those calves," Hogan said. "The meat is a better quality because of the Belgium Blue. We also sell the full-blooded Belgium cows for breeding purposes. It's not a really well-known breed, but people who raise them really like them."

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There are times when folks from Florida or California have called Mefford and Hogan to buy a Belgium Blue, according to Mefford, but their favorite place to sell is Frankfort's Farmer's Market.

"We sell all year long, but the summer time is our peak market," Hogan said, "because of the Farmer's Market."

Mefford said the Farmer's Market is a great place to socialize, as well as make a profit.

"Last year we made about \$20,000," Mefford said.

Her daughter agreed.

"Mom does all of the Farmer's Market stuff," Hogan said. "It's a social event for her as well as a business event. And we like to sell locally because it supports the local economy."

"As long as Mom wants to do it, we will continue," she added.

"It's fun to see everybody," Mefford said.

Mother and daughter keep the cows until they're no longer able to give birth, then sells them. But Hogan is sometimes sad to see the cows go.

"It can be hard at times," Hogan said. "They can be like pets when you raise them from when they are calves."

She also runs the concession stand at Franklin County High, where her daughter, Kelly, is a senior. She also has a daughter, Brett, 19, who attends Centre College.

Yet, the duo is not only interested in feeding their family the lean, healthier meat. Mefford said she would like to see more farmers keep and sell locally raised cattle rather than import beef.

"I hope it takes effect and other people do it," Mefford said. "You don't need steroids and hormones. The cows will grow at their own pace."

Hogan also noted the importance of not using supplements.

"Its healthier for everybody," Hogan said. "The growth hormones and steroids put in cows are bad for people."

Mefford and Hogan try to keep the cattle on an organic diet, supplementing only salt and minerals.

Overall, Mefford attributed the importance of selling healthier, local meat and the camaraderie of Farmer's Market to the longevity of her participation.

"Right now I'm doing exactly what I want to be doing," Mefford said. "At my age, that's important."



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